

Congresswoman Matsui Delivers Major Policy Address on Federal Priorities, Local Impact of Economic Recovery Package

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SACRAMENTO, CA – Today, Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (D-Sacramento) addressed a large crowd of students, faculty and community members at the Sacramento State Alumni Center, covering a variety of federal issues and outlining her priorities of the last year. Rep. Matsui also gave an update on the local impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which is making the largest alternative energy investments in our nation's history, and helping to propel Sacramento as a clean-tech capital. Matsui's remarks, as prepared for delivery, are below:

"I am pleased to be here today and to be able to share with you the enormous amount of progress being done in the House of Representatives. I want to spend my time talking with you about four main topics: higher education and the student loan changes that will make college more affordable; the comprehensive health care package currently being debated in Congress; our federal commitment to green technology and energy efficiency - initiatives that will drive our economy toward a clean energy future; and the economic stimulus bill that is making landmarks investments in our infrastructure and our economy.

“In the first eleven months of the year, we have tackled many of the issues that previous sessions of Congress did not have the political will, or the courage to do so. With the new Obama Administration, we have been able to take a fresh look at some of the persistent factors that have helped to derail our economy, and common-sense legislation that we could put in place to help get our country back on track.

“In addition to helping to pump money back into our economy and to get credit flowing for small businesses, we have also passed sweeping legislation that will help protect consumers from deceptive mortgages, credit card rate increases, and foreclosure practices that are cheating too many Sacramentans out of financial security and homes. And we are setting in place permanent fixes so that we never see the financial abuses so many have experienced in recent years ever again. This includes our plans to create a Consumer Financial Protection Agency, whose sole responsibility will be to protect Americans from deceptive practices such as these.

“We have also made enormous progress in modernizing our student loan system. H.R. 3221, the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act that the House passed this summer, directs the government to originate all student loans. Moving all loans to the Direct Lending program will save the federal government and taxpayers almost \$100 billion over the next 10 years as it eliminates the tax-payer funded subsidies that private lenders have been receiving to make student loans.

“Students in Sacramento will see a dramatic increase in their Pell grant awards in the coming years with total amounts being awarded going from \$44 million to over \$110 million in our community alone. The savings found through the Direct Loan proposal will help strengthen the Pell grant program, keep interest rates on student loans low, improve our community colleges, and expand early childhood education. Given the recent economic downturn, more and more students are seeking aid, and additional Pell funds will allow them to achieve their educational goals.

“I have heard from students like Elisa Piña who is a fourth year student here at Sac State. Elisa is receiving the Cal Grant and the Pell Grant, and is also a participant in the Federal Work-Study Program. With the recent state budget cuts, the Pell Grant is even more crucial to her ability to stay in school. In fact, without the financial aid afforded to her through these programs, she - and others like her - would have never been able to afford college.

“Elisa’s story, thanks to the federal loan program this Congress has supported, is one of millions in communities all across the country. It is my hope that recent federal changes will make it more affordable for students to seek a college degree, and easier for students to apply and qualify for high-quality, low-interest student loans.

“The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act also invests \$10 billion to strengthen community colleges. The bill helps to build a 21st century workforce by encouraging historic partnerships among community colleges, businesses and job training programs by aligning community college curriculum with the needs of high-wage, high-demand industries. It will also help ensure that every student can learn in a modern environment by helping to renovating local community college campuses in need of repair.

“And as many of you know, last week the House passed comprehensive health insurance reforms that will help us overcome our greatest obstacles to quality, affordable care for all Americans. After many months of vigorous debate and tremendous feedback from our constituents, we put forth a health care plan that will lower costs and expand access to quality health care for Sacramento families.

“I was extremely proud to vote in support of this legislation and to play an important role in its development. These developments came after several months of discussions between me and my constituents about ways to improve our current system; feedback which I used to work with my colleagues to strengthen earlier versions of the insurance legislation debated in Congress. Thanks to these conversations, the bill now includes important investments in Medicare, an expansion and strengthening of Medicaid, and a policy allowing young Americans to stay on their parents’

health insurance plans while they transition into financial independence.

“H.R. 3962, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, represents the views of the majority of my constituents, in terms of making health insurance work for all consumers at a price they can afford. And the legislation was not passed without careful consideration and deliberation. The bill that passed the House blends the bills passed out of each of the three House committees with jurisdiction over health policy, including the Energy and Commerce Committee, on which I serve.

“It builds upon the strong foundations put forth in earlier drafts and includes a number of policies and amendments I championed to invest in wellness and prevention, reinforce the public health system, provide more community-based resources for people with mental illness, and give seniors a choice about where to receive health services.

“This legislation will make health care affordable for the middle class and guarantee access to health insurance coverage for the uninsured. The plan is based on the premise of shared responsibility between the individual, employers, and the government. And in total, will enable ninety-six percent of Americans to become insured.

“The Affordable Health Care for America Act also includes long-overdue, sweeping new regulations of the insurance industry, such as prohibiting companies from denying coverage to those with pre-existing conditions and making it illegal for insurance companies to rescind people’s coverage when they get sick or become too expensive.”

“Finally, the package includes creation of a strong public health insurance option that will inject competition into the health insurance marketplace and guarantee that all Sacramentans have access to a comprehensive set of health insurance benefits.

“In my district alone, the Affordable Health Care for America Act will improve employer-based coverage for 365,000 Sacramentans and provide affordability credits to help pay for coverage for up to 181,000 households. This common-sense legislation will protect up to 2,000 families from bankruptcy due to unaffordable health costs.

“Most small business owners want to cover their employees - and this bill will allow over 14,000 local small businesses to obtain affordable health care coverage and provide tax credits to help reduce health insurance costs for up to 12,700 Sacramento businesses.

“Moreover, the Affordable Health Care for America Act will improve Medicare for 85,000 beneficiaries in my district, including closing the prescription drug donut hole for 7,900 seniors.

“We cannot afford not to enact the important protections for Sacramento’s families that are included in this legislation. The cost of inaction is far too great: the high cost of our current health insurance system is hurting our students, families, and businesses. Unless we help people live healthier lives, we will never get health costs under control. In short: the provisions of this legislation build on all that is good in our current health system to strengthen it for the future.

“My colleagues and I go to Congress to try and pass legislation to improve people’s lives and to recognize and address the needs of the people we represent. That’s why this year I have spent so much time on two of the largest domestic legislative accomplishments of our time: achieving health care that works for hard-working Americans;

and helping to put our country on the path to a clean-energy future.

“In June, the House passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act, legislation that reduces harmful emissions and invests in a clean energy economy. It is imperative that we address the real threats that climate change poses in regards to flooding and public health, and that we invest in clean energy technology that will reduce our dependence on foreign oil – and our carbon emissions – at the same time.

“In Congress, we are tackling these challenges head-on. The legislation passed by the House, and similar legislation recently introduced by our own Senator Barbara Boxer, will put us on a path to create new jobs and establish a cleaner, stronger economy that will make the United States a world leader in a clean-energy future. I am particularly pleased that both pieces of legislation includes language I introduced earlier this year relating to greenhouse gas reductions and land-use planning.

“The successes of Sacramento’s Blueprint – an example of how individual communities across the country can achieve much-needed emissions reductions by aligning their land-use policies with greenhouse gas-reduction goals – are now being built upon in three bills pending before Congress: the Boxer-Kerry bill, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, and the Smart Planning for Smart Growth Act that I introduced earlier this year.

“These bills comprise an energy plan and a jobs plan. By making these investments now, we can regain our competitiveness in the world by producing clean energy here at home. This Congress’s commitment to putting America on a path toward energy independence will allow our children – and our grandchildren – to live in a country that is more sustainable, more economically viable, and more energy-efficient than the country we live in today.

“As the Senate prepares to tackle many of these landmark legislative priorities already passed by the House, rebuilding our economy and putting Americans back to work is this Congress’s and the President’s number one priority. Instead of looking at the economy from a short-sighted view, or measure our nation’s success just on Wall Street ratings, the stimulus bill that Congress passed in February takes the approach that to invest in our country in the short-term, we have to strengthen our country in the long-term.

“That means investing in our roads, bridges, levees and other infrastructure. In Sacramento, it means \$24 million for Regional Transit, \$21 million for Sacramento flood protection, and \$32 million for local road rehabilitation.

“Across the Sacramento Region, that \$32 million in federal funding has allowed local cities and counties to make necessary improvements to our roads. With budget cuts across the board, these projects would not have happened and our streets would have only gotten worse. The money will help make your drive to and from school or work safer, and include major thoroughfares such as Arden, Truxel, and Power Inn. And new contracts are now being awarded, so I expect to see more projects to come on line in the next several weeks.

“The stimulus will also help three key flood control projects for our community, including levee improvements along the South Sacramento Streams Group, and the Folsom JFP. This is in addition to \$87 million in fiscal year 2010 funding that the President recently signed into law. And as we all know, keeping these projects going is key to our public safety.

“But in addition to these infrastructure improvements, the Recovery Act is also a long term investment in the American people, and in the institutions that will help improve every American’s quality of life. \$63 million of stimulus funding has come directly into Sacramento school districts, and is helping to stave off massive teacher lay-offs. For example, Elk Grove Unified has used \$16 million to reduce the number of teachers laid off in order to keep the

student-teacher ratio at acceptable levels.

“Another \$18 million is dedicated for job re-training and job placement, \$14.9 million for local law enforcement within Sacramento County alone, and \$14 million for local housing needs. The Effort Community Health Center has received over \$1 million, which has allowed the non-profit to take over the County’s Oak Park Clinic that was shut down, and provide necessary health services to those who need it most.

“And all of these projects represent just the beginning. The stimulus package is a \$780 billion investment in our economy and our future. The bill is not a one-time investment of money into our economy – it is spread out over three years – to make targeted investments that will position our nation for the future. Formula funds from existing federal programs were the first to be spent and now we are moving into competitive rounds of funding.

“Already, our community has received almost \$500 million in stimulus funding, and local government agencies, businesses, and non-profits have put in for many more grants, and we expect to receive millions more as we move forward. A complete list of stimulus funding coming to Sacramento can be found on my website, www.matsui.house.gov, as well as a map to see exactly where and how these necessary federal funds are being spent in our community.

“There are a lot of people in this room that are helping to make the goals of the stimulus package a reality in our community. Just recently, I had the privilege of announcing \$127 million in stimulus funding for a local smart grid energy project – a joint venture between the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), Sacramento State, the California Department of General Services, and the Los Rios Community College District to expand Sacramento’s comprehensive regional smart grid implementation.

“The grants are an integral part of a national effort led by President Obama to build a nationwide smart electricity grid that will reduce costs for consumers and businesses, make the electricity grid more efficient and reliable, and increase accessibility to clean, low-cost renewable energy sources. This project is the result of a wonderful partnership of local leaders, and will provide businesses with the additional funds they need to ensure we are continuing on the path to energy efficiency and lower emissions.

“SMUD’s work in the Sacramento region has brought our community to the forefront of alternative energy, and these stimulus dollars will serve to propel that momentum. The \$127 million grant will allow SMUD to install a comprehensive regional smart grid system to serve the Sacramento community from transmission to the customer. The updates to be completed include 600,000 smart meters, as well as 50,000 demand response controls. That includes programmable smart thermostats, home energy management systems to allow homes and businesses to monitor their usage more closely and engage in energy saving techniques.

“Additionally, this grant will help make Sacramento State a “smart campus,” by modernizing approximately fifty buildings, and leveraging the extraordinary talents of the University’s students and its faculty. SMUD will also be able to install one hundred electric vehicle charging stations in the Sacramento region.

“The whole Sacramento region will benefit from these funds as we move toward a more intelligent and more efficient energy future, in part as a result of this federal funding. Moreover, this grant strengthens the Sacramento region’s position at the cutting edge of technology and will enable us to be the clean-tech capital we have the potential to be.

“The fact that the Department of Energy has fully funded this request, and that SMUD is the highest recipient of such funding in the State of California, is the strongest possible validation of the utility of this project. But is also

representative of the leadership that Sacramento is ready to play in this new economy.

“This grant is just one example of how the federal government is laying the groundwork for our energy independence. And I am confident in our nation and region’s future because of the investments that have been made by the federal government in partnership with community leaders.”

“As you can see it has been a busy year in Congress. A lot has been done, but there is still so much more to do. In addition to creating jobs, we need to continue to bolster and strengthen our economy, and make sure all Americans have access to the clean-tech and high-tech jobs of the future.

“These days, most Americans rely on the internet as a resource to obtain emergency information, apply to college, find low-cost health care options, manage their finances, and seek employment assistance. In fact, it is noted that about three-quarters of all large U.S. companies now require job applications to be delivered online, creating a disadvantage for those without broadband.

“I have been a strong advocate for broadband grants to be allocated to schools and libraries, and to ‘underserved’ communities so that more Americans have access to the internet. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, only 58 percent of Californians earning under \$40,000 a year subscribed to dial-up or broadband at home. In contrast, 97 percent of those earning \$80,000 or more a year subscribed to one of these services. In most cases, adoption rates are associated with income.

“We need to extend the privilege of home internet access to all American families. That is why I’ve introduced legislation in Congress – the Broadband Affordability Act – to require the Federal Communications Commission to create a program to provide lower-income Americans living in urban, suburban, and rural areas with assistance in subscribing to affordable broadband services. For far too long, lower-income families have been disadvantaged in large part by the lack of access to affordable broadband services. To fully close the digital divide, it is critical that we address the affordability of these services.

“It is my pleasure to represent the Sacramento community in Congress, and thank you all for your feedback, your ideas, and your partnership over the several years. We need to continue to work together to deal with these complex challenges for the betterment of our community. I am extremely grateful for your time, and for your support.”

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